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DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATIONS OF
THE SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

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Soil erosion as a menace to the agriculture of the United States received national recognition in 1929 when the Buchanan Amendment to the Agricultural Appropriation Bill for the fiscal year 1930 (Public 769, 70th Cong., Feb. 16, 1929) was adopted by Congress. The amendment provided \$160,000 to be used by the Secretary of Agriculture in conducting soil erosion investigations. During the same year regional soil erosion experiment stations were set up under the direction of the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils in cooperation with the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering. A part of the funds for this work was assigned to the Forest Service to supplement and carry on research work which had been underway for several years to study the influence of forest cover on runoff. (See Hearings on Agricultural Appropriation Bill for 1931, House of Representatives, 71st Cong., 2d sess., pp. 408-429).

Additional appropriations were provided during the next 2 years to enlarge the activities of the erosion and water conservation research stations, 10 of which were established. New information about the nature of soil erosion and methods of erosion control were rapidly acquired on these stations.

Further impetus was given soil erosion studies when in June 1933 Congress passed the National Industrial Recovery Act (Public 67, 73d Cong.) which provided in Section 202 b, for erosion-control work as a means to unemployment relief. Three months later, September 19, 1933, the Soil Erosion Service was established without formal departmental order as a temporary agency of the Department of the Interior to carry out the provisions of the National Industrial Recovery Act relating to the prevention of soil erosion and to administer expenditure of Public Works Administration allocations for this purpose. Hugh H. Bennett was appointed Director of the Soil Erosion Service, and in the 18 months of operation under the Department of the Interior an extensive demonstrational program was put into effect throughout the country. Forty-one soil and water conservation demonstration projects were established and about 50 Civilian Conservation Corps camps were assigned to erosion-control work under supervision of the Soil Erosion Service.

Funds, personnel, property, and equipment of the Soil Erosion Service were transferred to the Department of Agriculture by an administrative order, signed by the Federal Emergency Administrator of Public Works on March 23, 1935, and approved by the President on March 25, 1935. (This administrative order cited Executive Order 6252, Aug. 19, 1933, and Executive Order 6929, Dec. 26, 1934, as authority for the action.)

On March 27, 1935, the Secretary of Agriculture, by Department Memorandum 665, ordered the consolidation, to become effective April 1, 1935, of all Department of Agriculture erosion-control activities. This order automatically expanded the organization to include the erosion-control experiment stations

of the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils and the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering, the erosion nurseries of the Bureau of Plant Industry, and the Emergency Conservation Work camps previously assigned to the Forest Service for erosion-control work on agricultural lands.

In the meantime several Congressional Committees were considering legislation to create a permanent Federal agency for soil erosion control. As a result, on April 27, 1935, and following passage by both Houses without a dissenting vote, the President approved the Soil Conservation Act of 1935 (Public 46, 74th Cong.). This law specifically established within the Department of Agriculture a "Soil Conservation Service" for the development and prosecution of a longtime program of soil and water conservation. Since the law provided that existing facilities should be used in the formation of the new Service, the Acting Secretary of Agriculture in Memorandum 673, April 27, 1935, ordered that the Soil Erosion Service become the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) with status as a regular bureau of the Department.

Gradual broadening of the program began with the transfer of 150 Civilian Conservation Corps camps from the Forest Service and assignment of more than 300 additional camps to the Soil Conservation Service in the summer of 1935 to extend demonstrations to wider areas. In the Omnibus Flood-Control Act of June 1936 (Public 738, 74th Cong.) Congress delegated both the Secretary of War and the Secretary of Agriculture to prosecute a national flood-control program. To carry out the Department of Agriculture's part of this program, the Secretary, in a Memorandum to Bureau Chiefs, dated November 30, 1936, delegated joint responsibility to the Forest Service, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, and the Soil Conservation Service. Subsequently SCS participated in a cooperative program relating to waterflow-retardation measures on upstream farm and range land. Work accomplished before World War II had to do largely with the preliminary and detailed surveys required in advance of actual remedial operations.

During August 1937, the Soil Conservation Service began cooperating actively with soil conservation districts organized by farmers under State laws.* This action was taken in order to follow through with basic principles for soil conservation work on agricultural land of the United States as laid down in

* In February 1937 the President submitted to the governors of all States A Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law, with suggestions that authority be given farmers and ranchers to organize districts specifically for conservation of soil and water resources. Legislatures of 22 States passed such laws that year. The first soil conservation district was chartered August 4, 1937. It was the Brown Creek Soil Conservation District in Anson County, N. C.-- the first of its kind in history. By July 1, 1945, all 48 States had enacted soil conservation districts laws and farmers were rapidly organizing districts. Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands passed such laws in 1946, and Hawaii and Alaska in 1947. By January 1, 1957, farmers and ranchers had organized 2,744 districts including 1,565,000,000 acres and 4,978,994 farms and ranches. The Soil Conservation Service cooperates with these districts, furnishing technical assistance in the making of conservation farm plans and applying such plans to the land.

the Report of the Secretary's Committee on Soil Conservation, approved by the Secretary on June 6, 1935. The Committee had recommended, and the Secretary had approved "that on and after July 1, 1937. . . all erosion-control work on private lands, including new demonstration projects, be undertaken by the Soil Conservation Service only through legally constituted soil conservation associations." From that date, therefore, the work of SCS began to change from a demonstrational character to one designed primarily to lend assistance to farmers and ranchers in soil conservation districts and to cooperate with such districts to the limit of the agency's available resources.

In July 1938, the Secretary of Agriculture directed the Soil Conservation Service to participate with the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the Farm Security Administration in the water-facilities program as authorized by the Pope-Jones Act of 1937 (Public 399, 75th Cong.). (See Water Facilities Board General Memorandum 2.) The work consisted of helping farmers and ranchers in low-rainfall areas of 17 Western States in building up water supplies through new installations, repair or enlargement of existing facilities, and developing conservation management plans for the farms and ranches where the work was carried on.

On October 6, 1938, the Secretary of Agriculture announced a realignment of Department functions and specifically assigned to the Soil Conservation Service (1) the land-utilization program authorized by Title III of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act (Public 210, 75th Cong.) previously administered by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, (2) drainage and irrigation investigations formerly conducted by the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering, and (3) certain action phases of the Cooperative Farm Forestry Program authorized by the Norris-Doxey Act of 1937 (Public 95, 75th Cong.). (See Secretary's announcement of Departmental Reorganization, dated Oct. 6, 1938, and related memorandums. See also Departmental Memorandum 785 for information on (1) and (3) above.) This served to consolidate in a single agency all soil erosion, flood-control, and related activities involving actual physical work on farmlands, on predominantly agricultural watersheds, and on certain other areas.

On April 19, 1940, Reorganization Plan IV (prepared by the President and transmitted to Congress pursuant to provisions of the Reorganization Act of 1939, approved Apr. 3, 1939) announced, along with other changes in governmental structure, the transfer to the Department of the Interior of functions, moneys, property, and personnel of the Soil Conservation Service with respect to soil- and moisture-conservation operations on land under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior. This transfer involved work, except research studies, previously carried on by the Soil Conservation Service on public land such as Indian Reservations in the West.

During World War II, various changes were made in the Soil Conservation Service's organization and functions. In 1942, by Executive Order, SCS was brought into the framework of the War Food Administration and, with other agencies of the Department of Agriculture, concentrated on developing and applying to the land all possible means of increasing production of war-needed crops.

The incentive of production for emergency purposes proved highly significant in the history of the Soil Conservation Service. More and more farmers

and ranchers requested technical assistance in applying conservation plans to their land. As a result, the Chief of the Soil Conservation Service issued Field Memorandum 1061, dated May 5, 1942, detailing a major reorganization and establishing basic policies and functions of the agency.

Briefly, the Soil Conservation Service adopted a line and staff organization, reduced the number of regional offices from 10 to 7, established small administrative State offices, set up teams of "zone conservationists" to facilitate technical liaison between the regional and field offices, eliminated several technical divisions and positions, and established and renamed others.

During this period the Soil Conservation Service's soils inspection and correlation work was transferred to the Bureau of Plant Industry, Soils, and Agricultural Engineering, by Secretary's Memorandum 1020, dated June 23, 1942. Also, effective July 1, 1942, as specified in Secretary's Memorandum 969 of January 12, 1942, work of SCS under the Water Facilities Act of 1937 was transferred to the Farm Security Administration. SCS activities under the Farm Forestry Act were expanded to include the Prairie States Forestry Project by authorization of the Secretary's Memorandum of June 30, 1942.

The Soil Conservation Service established a Water Conservation Division June 30, 1944. This was done in accordance with General Departmental Circular 39, issued May 2, 1944. As stated, the purpose was "to provide facilities for appropriate consideration of proposed activities and operations, together with related research, in water conservation, utilization, and disposal fields and to make these facilities available to other agencies of the Department which have responsibilities for action activities in these fields."

Administrator's Memorandum 27, Revision 1, Amendment 6, March 30, 1945, transferred to the Soil Conservation Service all functions of the Farm Security Administration relating to the water conservation and utilization programs of the War Food Administration in the Great Plains and arid and semiarid areas of the United States. These programs were authorized by the Case-Wheeler Act of August 11, 1939, as amended, and the item entitled "Water Conservation and Utility Projects" in the Interior Department Appropriation Act, 1940, as supplemented and continued available by subsequent legislation. The transfer was effected July 1, 1945.

Functions authorized by the Cooperative Farm Forestry Act of May 18, 1937, and administered by the Soil Conservation Service, were transferred to the Forest Service, together with the property purchased from the Norris-Doxey funds primarily concerned with the functions transferred. This transfer, in accordance with General Departmental Circular 67, dated June 20, 1945, became effective July 1, 1945.

The Soil Conservation Service, however, on recommendation by the Budget Bureau on July 1, 1942, and by mutual agreement within the Department, accepted the responsibility for completing liquidation of the Prairie States Forestry projects and carrying on windbreak plantings as a part of the integrated program of SCS in cooperation with soil conservation districts.

When the War Food Administration was terminated by the President's Executive

Order 9577, June 29, 1945, the Soil Conservation Service continued its functions as an independent agency directly responsible to the Secretary.

Flood-control work, which had been suspended for the duration of World War II as of July 1, 1943, was resumed by the Soil Conservation Service in 1945. Under the Flood Control Act of 1944 (Public Law 534, Dec. 22, 1944, 78th Cong., 2d sess.) SCS was authorized to apply special treatment for flood control on 11 watersheds embracing nearly 16 million acres of farmland in 12 States. The operations on all of the 11 watersheds are carried on in cooperation with soil conservation districts and other local and State organizations. SCS also resumed flood-control surveys and investigations on additional watersheds, in cooperation with the Forest Service, to determine whether flood-control measures would produce benefits in excess of costs and to develop a remedial program for each area.

During the post-war years the Soil Conservation Service, cooperating with soil conservation districts, developed new conservation farm planning procedures to speed up technical assistance to farmers and ranchers. The new procedure, known as "progressive planning," enabled farmers to start gradually and move progressively into well-rounded conservation programs on their farms. The progressive planning method was adopted officially by SCS and the districts on April 9, 1951.

On February 16, 1951, the Secretary of Agriculture, in his Memorandum 1278, directed closer coordination of the functions and activities of the Soil Conservation Service, the Agricultural Conservation Program of the Production and Marketing Administration, and the conservation programs of the Forest Service under supervision of the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture. The policy of this unified program was stated as follows: "The basic physical objective of soil conservation activities by the Department agencies shall be the use of each acre of agricultural land within its capabilities and the treatment of each acre of agricultural land in accordance with its needs for protection and improvement." As a part of the closer unification of the "agricultural resources conservation services" the Soil Conservation Service was made responsible for all technical phases of the permanent types of soil conservation work undertaken by the Production and Marketing Administration, in addition to former responsibilities. This memorandum also directed physical consolidation of United States Department of Agriculture's State and county offices, as soon as such consolidation could be efficiently accomplished. In the ensuing 2 years, many State and county offices of the Soil Conservation Service were consolidated with State and county offices of the Production and Marketing Administration and the Farmers Home Administration.

On October 14, 1952, the Secretary issued Memorandum 1318, placing responsibility for all soil-survey activities of the Department in the Soil Conservation Service. The soil-survey work and staff of the Agricultural Research Administration and the conservation surveys of the Soil Conservation Service were thus consolidated within the Soil Conservation Service. This work included mapping, classification, correlation, interpretation, direct laboratory services, map compilation, and publication. At the same time, the research activities of the Soil Conservation Service with regard to soil and crop management and to water management on farms related to crop production were transferred to the

Agricultural Research Administration. Both lines of work are carried on cooperatively with State agricultural experiment stations.

On February 25, 1953, the Secretary issued Supplement 1 to Memorandum 1278, suspending further action on consolidation of county and State offices of the United States Department of Agriculture, because in some areas consolidation tended to increase rather than decrease total expenses.

In Memorandum 1325, dated April 1, 1953, the Secretary assigned responsibility for administration of all the Department's flood-control and river-basin investigation activities to the Soil Conservation Service. Under this assignment SCS develops standards and procedures for the Department's flood-prevention work and plans and schedules watershed surveys and installation of flood-prevention measures.

The Department of Agriculture Appropriation Act for fiscal year 1954 (Public Law 156, 83d Cong., July 28, 1953) provided that 5 percent of the allocation for the Agricultural Conservation Program in any county may be allotted to the Soil Conservation Service for the services of its technicians in formulating and carrying out the agricultural conservation program in participating counties. The same Act set forth a plan for gradual discontinuance of the Soil Conservation Service's plant nurseries. Under the plan, SCS was authorized to continue the most essential work of the nurseries while making arrangements to turn it over to States, soil conservation districts, or other local organizations.

In July 1953, as part of the Agricultural Appropriations Act for fiscal year 1954, Congress appropriated funds to start demonstrations of combined soil conservation and flood-control work in 50 or more small watersheds. The Soil Conservation Service was assigned the responsibility for approving the areas to serve as pilot watersheds in a cooperative program and for helping local groups with technical phases of the work. SCS immediately started watershed-protection planning and operations in 60 small watersheds in 34 States. The pilot-watershed work was designed to demonstrate the practicability of complete watershed protection as a means of conserving soil and water; of alleviating damages from floods, silting of reservoirs, and impairment of stream channels; and of solving other upstream land and water problems.

On November 2, 1953, the Secretary of Agriculture issued a 'Departmental reorganization order (Memorandum 1320, Supp. 4) which grouped the agencies of the Department into four main groups. The Soil Conservation Service was included in the group called Federal-States Relations, together with the Agricultural Research Service, Forest Service, Federal Extension Service, Agricultural Conservation Program Service, and the Farmers Cooperative Service.

The reorganization order abolished regional offices of the Soil Conservation Service and gave greater responsibility for program formulation and execution to SCS State offices. Under the new alignment the Soil Conservation Service's head was designated as an "Administrator." The overall program is administered by the Administrator and his staff from Washington, D. C. The next operating level is in 50 State and Territorial headquarters whose staffs perform technical and administrative functions to provide service to field personnel in area and work unit offices. Each of the 325 area offices supervises several of the 3,028

work units where conservation technicians work directly with farmers and ranchers. Subject-matter specialists (engineering and watershed planning specialists, plant technologists, and cartographic field units), each serving a group of States, are located strategically throughout the United States to provide scientific and technical guidance and training and to produce soil maps, farm plans, and other essential working materials.

On January 1, 1954, the Secretary of Agriculture transferred the Land Utilization Program (Title III, Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act) from the Soil Conservation Service to the Forest Service.

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (Public Law 566) was passed by Congress and signed by the President August 4, 1954. The Act authorizes a permanent program by which the Department of Agriculture provides technical and financial assistance to local watershed groups willing to assume responsibility for initiating, carrying out, and sharing the costs of upstream watershed conservation and flood control. The Soil Conservation Service was designated as the USDA action agency, with primary responsibility for the Department's cooperation with local organizations in small watersheds throughout the Nation. The Act terminates Department of Agriculture activities under the Omnibus Flood Control Act of 1936, but retains authorities provided by the Flood Control Act of 1944 for completion of work on the 11 authorized watersheds and certain emergency activities. It provides new authority for continuing river basin investigations.

An amendment to the Water Facilities Act of 1937 (Public Law 597, 83d Cong.) was passed August 17, 1954. The amendment extended the water-facilities loan program of the Farmers Home Administration (formerly limited to the 17 Western States) to the entire Nation. In addition, the amendment authorized the Farmers Home Administration to conduct a program of direct or insured loans for the purpose of applying soil and water conservation practices to agricultural land. The Soil Conservation Service cooperates in the use of these authorities. Upon request of the Farmers Home Administration, SCS reviews the technical phases of loan applications, assists in preparation of conservation plans and designs, and supervises installation of approved practices and measures.

The National Inventory of Soil and Water Conservation Needs was established by the Secretary of Agriculture in Secretary's Memorandum 1396, dated April 17, 1956. The inventory will be made for each county in the United States. It will provide basic facts about the amount and kinds of soil, water, and plant resources as well as a realistic estimate of conservation treatments needed to safeguard and improve those resources. The Soil Conservation Service was assigned responsibility for leadership of the inventory. Other agencies of the Department and State and local agencies will contribute data and information on land and water-supply conditions and needs for conservation treatment and planning. Plans called for completing the initial inventory in 3 years, with periodic revisions thereafter to keep the figures and information up to date.

An amendment (Public Law 1018) liberalizing the provisions of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (Public Law 566) was passed by the 84th Congress and signed by the President August 7, 1956. Under the amendment, Federal assistance was provided for watershed projects that include municipal

and industrial water-supply development, as well as those involving upstream flood prevention, irrigation, and other phases of agricultural-water management. The amendment also increased the maximum size of dams and reservoirs for upstream protection, extended the benefits of the program to Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, and permitted retroactive application of the new provisions to watershed projects already underway. The Soil Conservation Service continued to administer the Federal assistance program under the Act.

New legislation (Public Law 1021), in the form of an amendment to the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act and the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, authorizing a Great Plains Conservation Program, was passed by the 84th Congress and signed by the President August 7, 1956. Under this amendment, the Department of Agriculture was authorized to give long-term technical and financial help to Great Plains farmers and ranchers. The act provides for technical assistance in preparing and carrying out a conservation plan of operations plus cost-sharing assistance, under the terms of contracts that may run up to 10 years, in establishing conservation practices.

Under leadership of the Soil Conservation Service, the program is designed to coordinate Department of Agriculture programs of technical assistance, cost-sharing, credit, insurance, research and educational aid. The program was designed to give Great Plains land users adequate time for making needed land use changes, and for applying suitable conservation practices on land subject to drought, soil blowing, or water erosion caused by sudden torrential rains.

The Soil Bank Act, passed by the 84th Congress May 28, 1956, as Title I of the Agriculture Act of 1956 and amended November 8 of the same year, set forth a long-term Conservation Reserve Program offering farmers and ranchers income protection while they make needed adjustments in land use. This assistance is designed to stabilize and protect soil and water resources and to help reduce production of crops that are in surplus. Responsibilities of the Soil Conservation Service in the program include: Technical assistance relating to conservation plantings, wildlife food and cover, and water-storage facilities; land-capability and soil-survey data and information where needed; and guidance to farmers and ranchers intending to make land use changes under the program.